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Hard Boiled

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Hard Boiled

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Report

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Abstract

Hard Boiled

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The filmmaker's experience collaborating with a private investigator to document the forensic reconstruction of a mass shooting on an American military base.

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Hard Boiled

The first film I made was a documentary about a British mathematician who went to Ceylon in the 1940s seeking spiritual consolation after the traumas of WWII. He ordained as a Buddhist monk and lived for over a decade in a remote, snake infested jungle, writing a brilliant and controversial philosophical monograph to distract himself from the chronic priapism which lead him to religious suicide¹.

I was interviewing people in Bundala, the village which had supported him for over a decade, when an unforeseen Sinhalese holiday left me stranded with nothing to read but a collection of hardboiled detective fiction. Something about the figure of the investigator was immediately enticing to a new filmmaker and my thoughts on that character type became the subject of my admissions essay for graduate school. The filmmaker, like the private detective, is someone who cobbles together an amorphous expertise out of seemingly disparate fields, obsessively pieces together an elusive narrative from endless, fragmentary information, and perpetually conceals and transforms his or her identity to suit any number of unexpected situations.

The subject of my thesis film is private investigator Louis Akin. He is a forensic investigator, meaning he examines the material conditions of a crime scene, almost exclusively homicides, to develop a narrative description of a murder. The film is about his career which in many ways culminated in his investigation of the Fort Hood shootings in 2009, his perspective on violence, and the personal consequences of examining the darkest aspects of human nature.

¹ Although culturally taboo, suicide has a complex history in Buddhist cultures. Various canonical texts allude to enlightened monks who commit suicide, at least one of whom may have become enlightened in the process of killing himself. A tradition of political self-immolation persists in several buddhist countries.

This project naturally brought back those questions which enticed me as a new filmmaker, and evolved my understanding of the concept of the investigator and my own role as a filmmaker. In the process of making this film I became a licensed private investigator, helping Louie photograph crime scenes and interview murder suspects. Although my personal narrative is absent from the film, I see this project as an indirect record of my own process of becoming intimate with homicide investigation and with the details of the 2009 mass shooting at Fort Hood.

Louie is sensitive and empathetic, but also an observer with significant moral and legal responsibilities to maintain objectivity. He is motivated by a curiosity about how human beings behave, but he also straddles a uncomfortable participant/observer boundary with the criminal worlds he investigates. During my involvement with this project I found my position as a filmmaker strangely analogous to Louie's position as a private investigator, at once calculating and analytical, but also uncomfortably close to the experiences of the victims and perpetrator of an unthinkable violent crime.



Fig. 1 Fingerprints. A copy of my fingerprints submitted to the FBI to obtain my private investigator registration.



Fig. 2 Investigator's License. The investigator's license issued to me by Texas DPS.

Louie

Entering my third year of the MFA program I had proposed to make a 16mm observational portrait of a community of chemically sensitive people living in a trailer park outside Dallas. After a month of preproduction they became hostile to the project and I had to pursue other leads.

I met Louie after responding to an ad requesting the services of a videographer to record him shooting several pigs for a ballistics test in El Paso. This initial encounter sparked my interest in Louie and his work and I asked him if he'd consider being the subject of my film. We met at his office and I interviewed him informally about his work and experiences. He seemed to have a treasure trove of life experiences and the insight and self-awareness to speak about the ways his proximity to violence and injustice have transformed his view of the world and his understanding of himself. Within hours of first meeting him I heard about the time he went undercover in the Ku Klux Klan, his run-ins with the Hell's Angels, and the mechanics of a bullet shattering a human skull.

We spent a long time talking that first day and he explained to me what he does for a living. Essentially, Louie is hired by defense attorneys to investigate the physical evidence at a crime scene and reconstruct the narrative of what took place. This usually means figuring out where people were when they were injured, what kind of weapons were used, people's movements after they were injured, etc. Although this description is entirely physical, absent of the subjective or psychological details of the crime scene, his investigation is often critical to proving the guilt or innocence of a defendant. In one case, Louie showed from the trajectory of a bullet wound that the murder victim was attempting to attack the accused murderer with a machete before he was shot, proving that the attack was in self defense. As our conversations continued, it became clear to me that I was talking to a sensitive, intellectual and articulate man. I was convinced that he

would be an excellent subject for a film, although I didn't know what form the film would take.

One of the initial concerns about working together was confidentiality. As a private investigator Louie can only reveal information about his cases if it has come out in trial and entered the public record. As a way to bring me into the world of his investigations, Louie asked me to become his employee and become deputized under his investigator's license (fig. 2). This licensing would allow him to bring me along on his investigations while keeping me bound by the same rules of confidentiality that applied to him. In other words, I could take photographs of crimes scenes for him and read his case files, and if ever subpoenaed I would be legally bound to keep that information confidential.

To become his employee I had to register my fingerprints (fig. 1) with the FBI and register with the Department of Public Safety, all of which proved, perhaps unsurprisingly, a painfully byzantine process, the details of which I will spare the reader of this report. Ultimately, as a result of making this film, I was issued a private investigator's license for the state of Texas.

Fort Hood

One of the early ideas about how to structure this film was to hang it on a specific case. Louie had several ongoing investigations which seemed promising like the alleged murder of a mentally ill Houston businessman by the Houston Police Department. I pursued these leads with him, went on ride alongs and read his case files, but no individual case stuck out to me until Louie started telling me about his involvement in the Fort Hood investigation in 2009.

In 2009, Major Nidal Hasan, a military psychiatrist who had treated soldiers coming back from Afghanistan with PTSD, killed 13 soldiers and injured dozens more in a medical processing facility at Fort Hood in Killeen, Texas. Louie had been hired by the defense to reconstruct the crime scene, a process which entails cataloging every bullet hole, mapping every blood trail, and working out a narrative description of the crime scene. It was years of work, the most complex crime scene he'd ever reconstructed, and in many ways the culmination of his career.

He showed me a diagram of the crime scene (fig. 5), a precise and clinical representation of profound terror and chaos. I was immediately fascinated with this diagram, and found myself coming back again and again to that image, the first indication that the Fort Hood investigation could be the subject of my film.

I had some reservations about focusing the film on Fort Hood. The case could simply be too big, too unwieldy to treat in the time I had. I knew I didn't have the resources to make a film which would treat the crime and the politics surrounding the case exhaustively.

I was also worried about how to handle the content sensitively. Michael Haneke said of *Schindler's List*, "The mere idea of trying to create suspense out of the question of whether the shower head gas is going to come is

unspeakable” (Belloni). To treat a historical atrocity in film, a medium which lends itself so easily to entertainment, melodrama and propaganda, the filmmaker has to be careful to avoid the techniques of emotional manipulation which are such an integral part of the form. If I were to make this mass shooting an important element in my film, I knew I wanted to make its presentation as stripped down and “anti-cinematic” as possible, to minimize the kinds of manipulation that come into play, and at the very least acknowledge those formal devices self-consciously in the film.

There was a line of dialogue that got cut out of my final edit where Louie says of the Fort Hood shooting, “I wish people would not rush to judgement about how to handle a situation like this. When this happens, we have to investigate it.” I tried to apply that approach with this delicate material. I tried to withhold my emotional judgements of the scene and allow Louie’s presentation, already fairly dry and objective, to speak for itself.

Influences

I knew from this time spent with Louie that a film about him would rely heavily on interviews. He was charismatic and a natural storyteller, and it would be important to have him tell his own stories in front of the camera. I also wanted to leave out some of the more graphic visual content this film could provide, and instead force the viewer into a more personal, subjective encounter with Louie, and his unique perspective on violence. In other words, I wanted this to be a film about a man's experience with violence rather than about violence as such.

The first and most obvious reference for me was Errol Morris, one of the filmmakers who inspired me when I began making films. His films often treat dark and violent subjects: wrongful imprisonment, prison execution, holocaust denial and the Vietnam war. At their core, the films are well edited interviews with little, if any, cinema vérité. Although highly contrived, the films masterfully reveal complex characters and situations through verbal testimony.

The opening biographical section of my film is perhaps the most heavily influenced by Errol Morris: a closeup of an interview subject making direct eye contact with the audience, musical score lacing together photographs that accompany the narration. I also incorporated jump cuts spaced out with a few frames of black, another technique lifted from Morris' films.

One of the things that's interesting to me about Errol Morris' technique is that he simultaneously creates suspension of disbelief, dramatic empathy, but through direct address (he is of course using archival material and music). So, the films are full of emotional connection to the characters but you are also aware that you are being narrated a story by a story teller. There isn't a pretense of vérité - you're in this kind of story telling that doesn't conceal itself behind a pretense of naturalism.

I was also interested in Gianfranco Rosi's *El Sicario: Room 164*. While Errol Morris's films are full of dramatic flourishes, rich musical score and dynamic archival imagery, *Room 164* is starkly minimalist in its examination of the extreme violence of the Mexican drug cartels. The film, which is a single interview with an ex-cartel member in a hotel room, never cuts out of the hotel room where the interview takes place, and in lieu of photographs Rosi has his subject make crude drawings in a large notebook to illustrate the kind of violence he committed. There is no b-roll, there is no cutting away.

While I was conceptualizing my own project this extreme formal minimalism was instantly attractive to me. Violence is one of the most consistent tropes of cinema. Audiences are used to, and in some ways expect sensational violence. It seems like part of the pleasure of watching films is precisely the thrill of experiencing violence at a safe distance. Rosi's withholding of violence is at once more chilling, and a political gesture that refuses to turn the realities of drug trafficking in Mexico into melodrama and entertainment. The audience should never be manipulated to connect with the interviewee and his stories through cinematic devices, but should be presented the story in such a way that even if you cannot do away with cinematic manipulation altogether, at least makes clear to the audience where and how the "filmmaking" is happening.

I wanted to present Louie's examination and understanding of extreme violence in a way that was radically opposed to the conventional cinematic portrayal of violence. One reviewer situates the film in the tradition of the catholic confessional and the legal deposition (Mintzer). One of the thoughts between my formal decisions was that I wanted to keep the discussion of Fort Hood entirely within Louie's perspective as an expert witness, approaching the interview as a kind of deposition. In my interview with Louie about Fort Hood I self-consciously refused to cut away to photographs of the crime scene, to use additional sound effects or music, or any device which would manipulate Louie's direct presentation of the story. Where I do cut away, I cut away to a 3D rendering of

the space that are just extensions of the diagram already in play. With the exception of two photographs of Nidal Hasan, all of the visual material in the Fort Hood interview is drawn directly from Louie's expert analysis of the crime scene.

Fig. 3



Mr.

Death.



Fig. 4 El Sicario: Room 164.

The Setups

I'm not sure if my tendency toward minimalism is an aesthetic preference or a matter of economy (or laziness). But for this project I knew I wanted to use the absolute minimum number of camera setups, to push for total formal simplicity so that the complex and traumatic content would have as little adornment as possible.

Sit Down Interview

This setup is drawn directly from the interview configuration Errol Morris uses in his films. The setup uses two cameras, one on the subject and one on myself. Teleprompters in front of either camera allow the director and subject to make eye contact through the camera lens. In other words, I see a live feed of Louie's face on a teleprompter in front of the camera pointed at my face, and Louie sees a live feed of my face in front of a camera pointed at his face. This allows the interviewee to effectively make direct eye contact with the audience. The effect is unsettling, confrontational, and intense. I wanted the audience to feel that Louie was telling them directly about his experiences, and for them have to feel the full emotional weight of the violence he describes.

Renting a teleprompter is fairly expensive and the school had a piece of teleprompter glass - a specialized, partially reflective and highly transmissive glass - that I was allowed to use. I built a crude wooden frame that would hold the teleprompter glass at a 45 degree angle over a monitor and used duvatene, a black, light proof fabric, to make a tent around the lens and the teleprompter glass, blocking out unwanted reflections and allowing the camera to see through the glass to Louie's face. The build was not ideal, and required some more finegling than a professional teleprompter would, but saved the production a lot of money.

I chose to allow the background to fall to black and light Louie's face without contrast to further de-emphasize the formal elements of the film.

Cinematographers are usually concerned with creating the illusion of depth in a two dimensional medium, and filling the frame with contrast and visual texture. For the interviews I wanted the viewer to feel like "there is nowhere to go," that the image itself provides as little aesthetic interest as possible, so Louie's face and voice are as directed and confrontational as possible. The black background and flat lighting also serves to abstract Louie as much as possible from a "real world" where he might be sitting and talking. To me this heightens the feeling that we are inside his mind and experiences, and not observing a person in the world.



Fig 5. Interrotron. Two 2k soft lights are used to create even light on Louie's face, positioned to the side to avoid reflections in his glasses. Louie looks directly into the principle camera, in front of which a homemade teleprompter displays an image of my face, coming from the camera in the background. The broken microwave was used as a DIT station.



Fig. 6 The Interview. Still from one of the sit down interviews with Louis Akin.

My reconstruction of the Fort Hood crime scene was inspired by a diagram I saw in Louie's office (Fig. 7). I found the diagram instantly captivating; its cold, analytic design contrasted starkly with the chaos and terror it represented. I knew that this contrast was at the core of Louie's experience as an investigator, and an emotional territory I wanted to explore for the film. I'm not sure when the idea occurred to me, but it was one of those spontaneous ideas that arrives after a lot of unconscious processing. I wanted to see Louie demonstrate his work process in a life size version of the diagram that he created, a distilled representation of the most complex investigation of his career.

I considered several variations on the reenactment before settling on the approach I used in the film. At one point I considered building sets, using actors, and having Louie himself direct the scene, thinking that putting him in an unfamiliar situation - directing actors - might bring out his perspective on the scene, his thoughts about the emotions and human consequences of the tragedy in an interesting way.

Ultimately, those ideas were both impractical and risked degenerating into something sensationalistic or too self-consciously conceptual to remain respectful to the content. There were also several advantages to simply enlarging the diagram Louie had already created, and asking him to walk through it during the interview. From a producing standpoint this was the most practical and straightforward approach - although it did end up taking weeks of production design work.

The biggest organizational hurdle of this project was orchestrating the production design for the diagram. The school had recently taken over an enormous 4 story sound stage that had previously belonged to KLRU. There were certain limitations to the space, but it was an enormous, sound proof film studio which

could accommodate the diagram at nearly full scale. The studio had been used for storage of surplus equipment and was littered with the remains of the sets of the films which had been shot there before mine. Because there was nowhere else to store the equipment and no practical way of moving all the sets out of the studio, we had to simply push all the equipment and flats against the back wall. Then, due to the configuration of the catwalks, we'd have to shoot in the direction of the wall of garbage.

I also felt that removing any reference to the real crime scene, refusing images of violence, or even performances by actors of the events in the scene, I could force the audience into Louie's perspective. I could make this a film about his experience reconstructing this scene, rather than about the scene itself. I began to think of the diagram and the reconstruction of the crime scene as Louie's magnum opus, the highest expression of his skills and expertise. Louie is most passionate about his work when he has the chance to use his skills to free an innocent person. He deeply concerned with the corruption and racism of the criminal justice system and the moral bankruptcy of the death penalty. It was ironic to me that his investigation into the Fort Hood shooting, which brought together a career's worth of experience, demonstrated unambiguously that Hasan murdered 13 soldiers in cold blood.

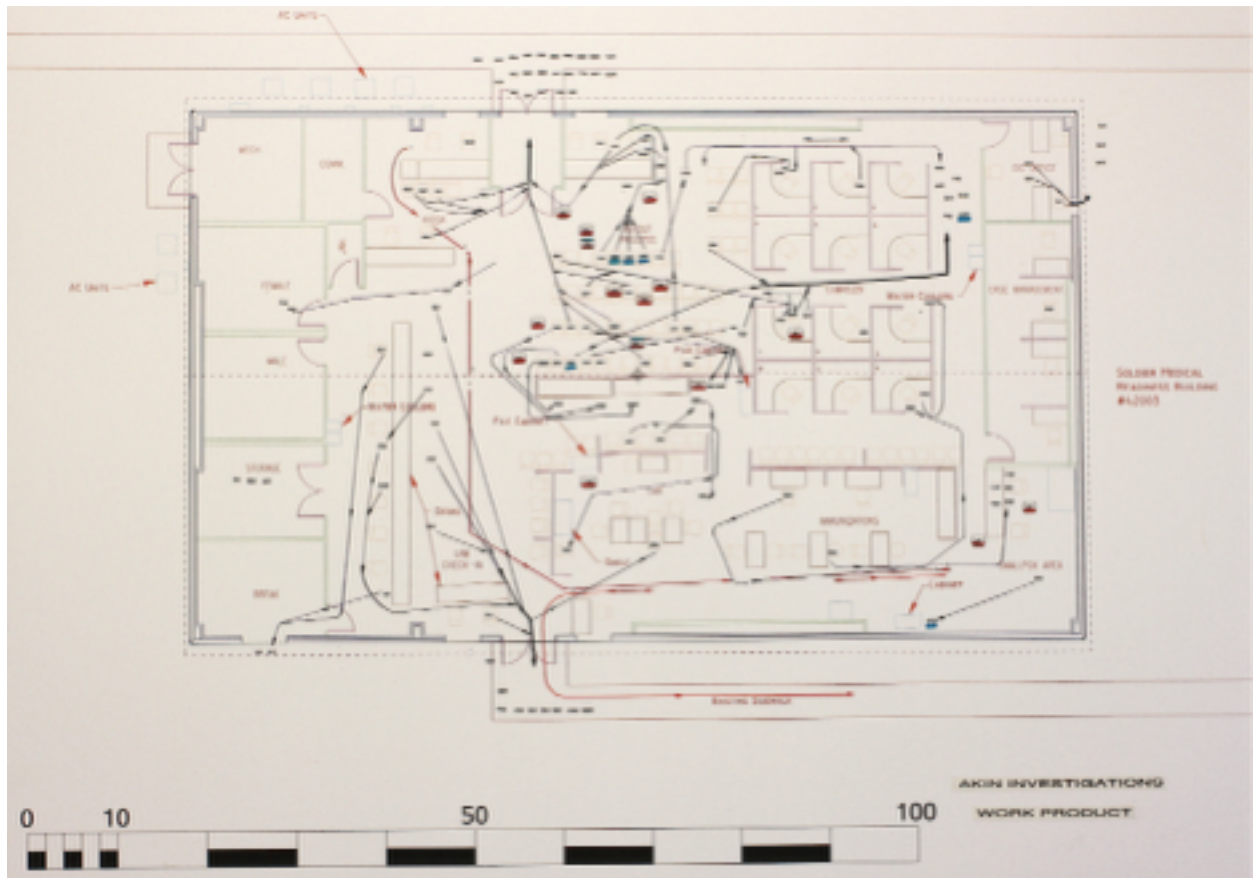


Fig. 7 The Diagram. The original diagram used in Akin's investigation of the Fort Hood shootings.

Figure 8 is an architectural plan of the Bates Recital Hall where we ended up filming the closing shot. The shot was originally conceptualized as a two minute zoom past a string quartet into a closeup on Louie's face as he watches the musicians perform the piece Schubert composed on his deathbed. The camera was placed in a second story organ loft above the stage, aimed at Louie, who was placed in the third row.

The concept for the closing shot was simple although it required precise execution. The quartet would be in the shot, meaning we would have to use sync sound and time the shot to record the portion of the performance I would ultimately use in the end of the film. Since it was a live performance there would be no opportunities for a second take. The school has a servo operated zoom lens can be programmed to execute a zoom that lasts from a half second to five minutes. Unfortunately, the Canon software engineers have designed the servo's user interface in such a way that the speeds are programmed on a scale from 1 to 800, numbers which are only related to the speed of the zoom along some kind of arbitrary non-linear curve. What this meant is that I couldn't just time out how long I wanted the zoom to be and plug that into the lens - I had to spend several hours testing and plotting different settings to make the zoom happen at the desired speed.

The Butler School of Music was incredibly accommodating, offering us a high quality five channel recording of the performance off of their in house audio recording setup (the microphones are actually visible in the first few seconds of the shot). The Miro Quartet was equally supportive, but we did run into some production logistical problems in the days before the shoot was scheduled. Bates Recital Hall was designed with highly reflective areas around the organ loft which create too much reverberation for the quartet. The quartet asked the school to provide a band shell, a sort of moveable acoustic wall, which greatly improved

the quality of their performance for the audience and helped the musicians hear one another on stage. Of course, the band shell entirely blocked the shot as I had conceptualized it. The only workable solution would have been to ask the audience to stay after the performance ended to watch the quartet re-perform the first three minutes of the piece I would need for my edit.

Although I was frustrated with the uncertainty this would inject into the shoot - I had no idea if anyone would stay, if the audience would be able to avoid looking at the camera, if this would make Louie feel self conscious, etc - this approach also had some appeal. We could reposition audience members and the quartet, and also do several takes if necessary. I also began to prefer this approach conceptually. I liked the idea of closing the film with what appears to be the only vérité footage in the film, but is in fact a performance of a performance, staged specifically for the film.

Ultimately the quartet backed out at the 11th hour after deciding there was really no way to accommodate what I needed and still use the bandshell. However, Simeng Wu, a 3rd year piano PhD student graciously allowed us to record her 3rd year qualifying performance and use it in the film. Coincidentally, she was to perform a different selection from Schubert, which Louie recognized as one of his favorite pieces when he was a young investigator in San Francisco. Although I'm pleased with the outcome of the final shot, I do regret that the audience in the shot is not more filled out. Had we been able to record the Miro Quartet performing the closing shot would have featured a packed audience facing the audience of the film, creating a rich tapestry of faces and characters to contemplate during the long zoom.

This shot is both the closing shot, and the only footage in the entire film which is shot outside of a soundstage. I knew that I would need something to show Louie outside of the space of the Fort Hood reconstruction, something that take him away from the abstract space of the crime scene and put him back in the real

world, among people, in a wider context than the reality in his head. It's a reminder that there is life beyond violence and trauma and that his life continues after a career investigating homicides. There are characters in the audience who inject an element of levity into an otherwise entirely sober film, a child bobbing her head impatiently, a husband checking his phone. While the shot is in some ways the most naturalistic shot in the film it is both hyper self-referential and formally controlled, an acknowledgement of the film's position vis-a-vis cinema vérité and a reminder of the artifice of non-fiction.

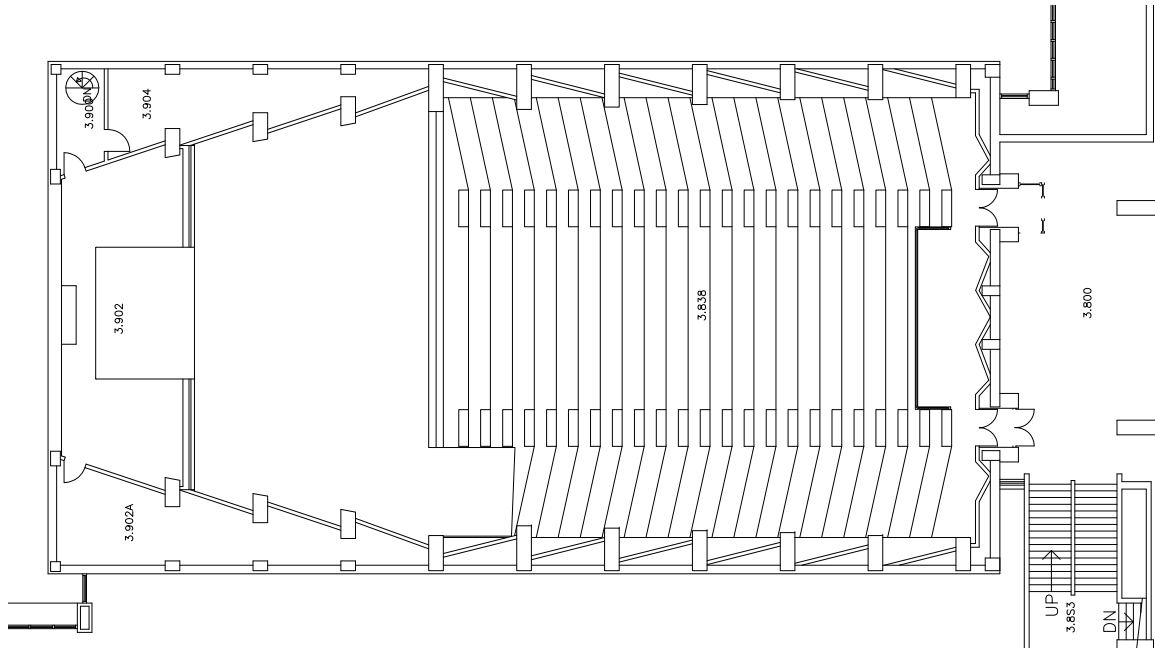


Fig. 8 Bates Recital Hall. The camera was positioned in the organ loft at the left of the diagram.



Fig. 9 Closing Shot.

Any film that consists mostly of interviews has to address the issue of b-roll. The term itself, which to me suggests less significant material collected to hide edits more than for its content, is indicative of the problem b-roll poses.

Because the sit down interviews were shot from only one camera angle, any kind of rapid jump cutting would become unwatchable. I did ultimately allow some jump cuts - the first cut in the film is a jump cut - but I did have to cover a lot of the dialogue editing to construct a concise summary of Louie's backstory. In addition to concealing cuts, the photos enhance the first person perspective because they show Louie's memories and experiences as he describes them.

Most of Louie's personal photo archive is digital, but I was resistant to the idea of simply bringing the digital images into AVID and presenting them on the screen. I wanted the photos to appear as physical objects, almost like pieces of evidence. I made a selection of 50 or so photos I thought I could use, and sent them to a printer and shot about 10 seconds of each photograph lying on a wooden surface.

For the Fort Hood reconstruction, I did not want to cut away to photographs. I wanted the film to remain strongly in Louie's point of view. Cutting to photographs of the crime scene would break the almost claustrophobic sense of being inside Louie's mind, inside his experience of reconstructing the crime, and swing the film to being more of a procedural or exposé about the crime scene itself.

The first solution to this problem was to shoot the interview with three cameras so that I could always cut away to two other angles. But we also shot a few types of b-roll. I did have Louie hold up a picture of Hasan and a picture of the gun he used feeling that these two images would be the only permissible violation of my self-imposed rule that I would not cut to objective images of the crime scene. We

also shot tracking shots of the diagram, which I thought could be used as abstract visual cutaways. We ended up not using them, and settled on graphics (see the chapter on post production), which had the dual purpose of separating sections of the interview, and providing a reminder of the space represented in the diagram, reorienting the viewer in space. In the end, the fort hood interviews only cut away to a 3D model of the space depicted in the diagram, information which is part of Louie's reconstruction, he own expert perspective on the scene.

Post Production

Post production was the most emotionally difficult part of the process for me. The footage in the final film represents only a small portion of hours of detailed descriptions of the circumstances of the mass murder that took place at Fort Hood, as well as dozens of other gruesome crime scenes which Louie has investigated. I watched all of this material multiple times, and became intimate with it throughout the months of editing. Often I would find myself after a day of editing lying down to sleep, and when I closed my eyes I would imagine the people in Building 42003, the terror and anger and confusion they were experiencing.

My approach to editing is relatively straightforward. I had an assistant transcribe all of the interviews and synchronize them with the media, so I could use the transcript of the film to navigate to a given moment in the interviews. I began by watching all the footage straight through, without taking notes. I then went through all the footage a second time and made a timeline of selects, any moment that was interesting to me for the information it contained or for what it revealed about Louie's character. This first timeline of selects was about two hours. After that the process was simply one of reduction. I watched through the selects and began cutting out material that was either uninteresting or redundant, organized related material together, and looked for moments that had strong emotional resonance, provided important exposition, or felt intuitively important.

One of the challenges I ran into while screening rough cuts to people was that people were unclear about the meaning of the diagram and Louie's orientation in the space of the crime scene during his explanation of what happened. I had been working with a graphics team to use a 3D scan of the facility where the shooting took place to create abstract tracking shots through the space that could be used as b-roll. It turned out that using these graphics abstractly was confusing since they didn't clarify what space we are looking at. We had also toyed with the

idea of using the graphics as exposition, to show people's position and movement in the scene, i.e. illustrating the perspectives of Hasan and the victims. What I realized after screening rough cuts was that the graphics were needed to remind people what they were looking at when they saw Louie in the diagram. So we created moving shots that would push in to the camera position for the first shot of each section. That way the viewer could be carried through the space in between scenes, but be brought to a new position that would show them what they were about to hear.

Arriving at the structure for the film was the biggest challenge. From the outset I knew my film would treat the Fort Hood shooting in depth, and I had an idea which stories from the event would become part of the film. As it stands the structure of the film adheres to a linear chronology. It begins with a section introducing Louie as a character, his aspirations to become a writer and how that led him into crime scene investigation. From there it transitions into the section on Fort Hood, the biggest investigation of his career and concludes with a single shot of him listening to a piano recital.

In the Fort Hood interviews, the film starts by introducing Nidal Hasan and explaining what the diagram represents. Initially I had not included any exposition about the diagram, assuming that people would figure out how to read it through the course of the film and that the details of diagram would actually seem insignificant, the diagram serving more as an impetus for Louie's testimony. After screening the rough cut it became clear that people were confused about what the diagram represented, what the arrows, codes, and colors meant, so I went back and created a small sequence at the beginning of the Fort Hood section clarifies what the diagram means.

Following this exposition, the film narrates three scenes within the shooting. I knew there would be some process of ellipsis in representing this crime scene - there were so many people, so many individual traumas, that to give each one

thorough treatment would have been impossible. The three stories I chose are a stand in for the event as a whole. A pregnant soldier is shot, and two other soldiers are shot while trying to hide her, one of whom takes several bullets in his back to hang on to his friend's bleeding neck, saving his life. In the second scene, the colonel in charge of the unit immediately escapes the scene, locking a door that would have served as the escape route for a group of vulnerable soldiers hiding behind a row of cubicles. In the final scene, Hasan leaves the building, and the nurses who had been hiding in a locked room come out and take charge of the situation, triaging the wounded soldiers and saving dozens of lives. Louie then describes the aftermath of the event, his interviews with the soldiers, his interview with Hasan and the personal consequences this investigation had for himself.

This structure was not emotionally satisfying for some of the people who saw rough cuts. The procedural section of the film, Louie's descriptions of the crimes scene, felt too dry and disconnected from his personal experience. I experimented with at least two other structures that tried to intercut the procedural breakdown of the crime scene with Louie's reflections on the aftermath. I even shot a pickup interview and had Louie talk more about the trial and politics of the Hasan case.

Ultimately these alternative structures felt forced, and didn't connect the viewer to Louie in different or interesting way. Intercutting the narrative of the crime scene with the Louie's reflections on the aftermath was disorienting, and his commentary on the trial made the film go too much in a political direction, that actually disconnected me from Louie's experience even more.

After experimenting with these alternative structures, I realized that the initial structure was both more logical - in that it presented everything chronologically - and that spending an uncomfortable amount of time dissecting the crime scene was an important part of the concept of this film. First of all, it gives the audience

a chance to experience what Louie's work is like - a clinical, almost banal cataloguing of atrocities. The clinical manner in which Louie treats the scene belies subtle moments of powerfully expressed empathy. For instance, at one point Louie says "He get's shot twice in the back, but he's not gonna let go of the grip on his friends neck. Saved his life." It's one of the rare moments where Louie leaps from a physical description of events into a psychological description, as he marvels at this man's courage, the bond of friendship which allowed him to sacrifice himself for his friend. It is a small moment, but it stands out in his otherwise dry, procedural account of the scene. All the stories he tells include these brief, understated moments of reflection where Louie acknowledges his emotional connection to the scene. For me these moments, while subtle, are crucial to the film, reminding us of the difficulty of Louie's position, simultaneously an objective analyzer and a human witness to trauma.

Nothing Human

Under military law a person cannot be executed without entering a not guilty plea. Nidal Hasan plead not guilty, and when the trial started after years of preparation, he fired his legal team and experts, including Louie. Louie's meticulous reconstruction of the crime scene was part a bureaucratic process necessitated by the manipulations of a murderer seeking his own martyrdom.

Part of what fascinates me about Louie's work is precisely its bureaucratic nature. His analysis makes no allusions to subjectivity, desire, morality or conscience. It is a simple catalogue of the material facts which make up the most grotesque actions imaginable. His work is the accounting of an immense bureaucratic apparatus that is erected to deal with a trauma on this scale. In his capacity as an accountant of violence, Louie develops an impersonal gods-eye view of every scene he works on, but at the some time is forced into deeply considering the extremes of violence and human emotion.





The title of the film, *Nothing Human*, is excerpted from a quote from the Roman playwright Terrence Louie cited during the interview: "I am a human, nothing human is alien to me." He is talking about his experiencing interviewing Nidal Hasan after the shooting, and his effort to empathize with him, to understand his perspective and motivation. When I ask him directly if Hasan felt any remorse after the event, despite the fact that he had spoken to Hasan about that very question, he says he can't answer, because that information did not come out in trial. One of the questions the film asks is if a violent act this extreme can be understand as the behavior of another human being, or if it exceeds our capacity for empathy. It was fortunate for the film that Louie could not answer this question directly, because it leaves the issue unresolved and therefore poses the question more forcefully to the audience. The title alludes to this ambiguous moment in the film. Is this act inhuman? Or are humans by their nature profoundly violent in a way we are afraid to examine?






A related question raised by the film is that of the politics surrounding this case. Hasan was a military psychiatrist, treating soldiers who were returning from Afghanistan with PTSD. He began to identify so strongly with militant Islam that he decided to kill a group of soldiers who were preparing to deploy to Afghanistan. He deliberately targeted only soldiers, despite the presence of numerous vulnerable civilians in the building, suggesting that he saw this shooting as a military action. The US government refused to call the shooting a terrorist attack, and has instead classified it as an act of workplace violence². Had it been designated a terrorist attack, it would have been the largest attack on a domestic military base in American history. Although these issues are not treated directly in the film, it is apparent that this shooting took place in the context of the war in Afghanistan and the United States military.

² This designation has repercussions for the soldiers involved in this scene who were not eligible for the same pension and benefits accorded to soldiers who are injured in the line of duty.

Appendix A Transcript

A film is a text.

	<p>The second thing that you do after you remove the viscera is to make a cut across the head, an incision, and you refract the face and the back of the scalp. Then you take a bone saw and you cut around the calvarium and remove it, the top of the skull. Then you cut the cranial nerves, and you remove the brain.</p>
	<p>And I was carrying that brain and I was thinking this is a thing that thinks of poetry, and hears music, and loves. And all of those things we consider human. This is the organ.</p>
	
	<p>My whole life I had in the back of my mind that I wanted to get</p>

	<p>experiences to later write about. Wanted to be a</p>
	<p>writer</p>
	<p>You don't just walk in to start talking gang members without a reason.</p>
	<p>I was a criminal defense investigator. It opened doors</p>
	<p>that no other job would open for me.</p>



So I was in and out, again, in the back rooms of all these



mafia bars

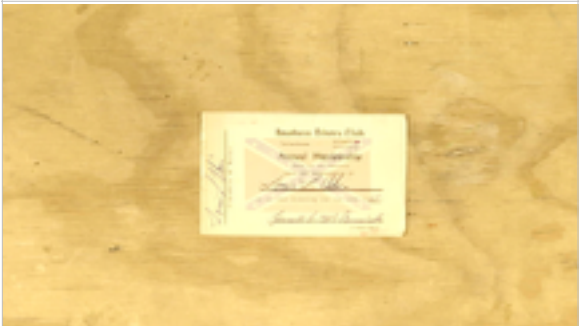


and topless clubs



I was sworn in to the Ku Klux Klan.





I was sworn in to the Ku Klux Klan.

It was a brutal world.



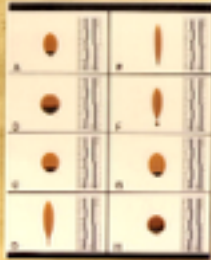
It was a pretty disgusting world.



It was disconcerting but it was also fascinating.



When I get the case I look at all of the evidence. Look at the blood spatter, look at bullet holes,



And basically reconstruct what happened in that scene, while the murder was taking place.





I've been dealing in murder for 20 years.

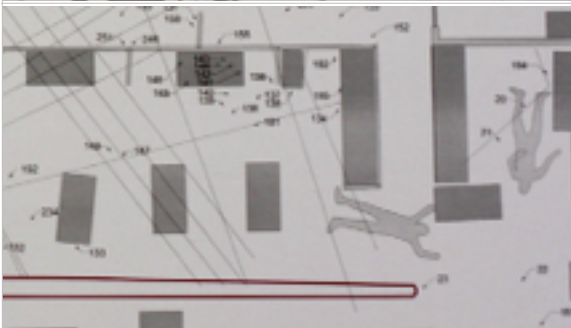
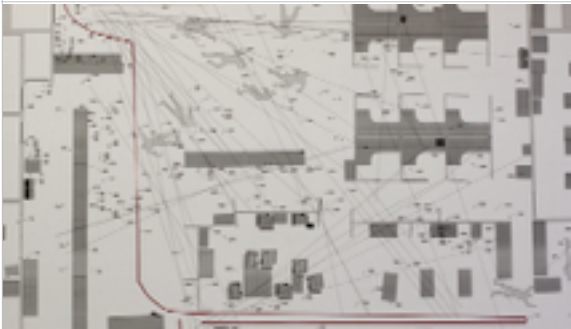


Violence has its place in human affairs.

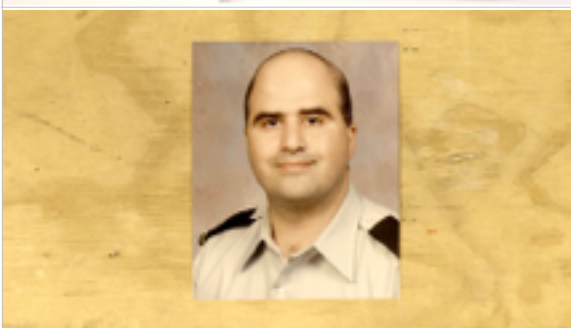




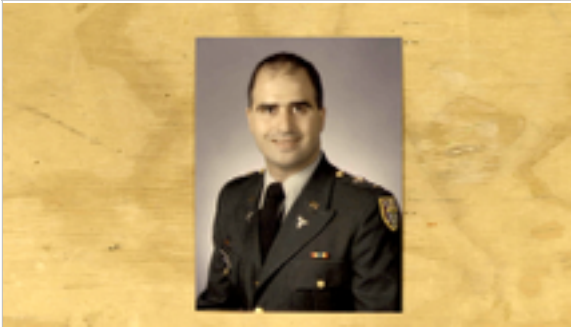
13 people were killed and 32 more were wounded. People were crawling all over each other, crawling around the room leaving blood trails everywhere.



There were 242 shots fired. Figuring out the trajectories from those and where people were, where they got hit, was an immense job.



Major Hasan, a military psychiatrist, he treated soldiers who had come back from afghanistan with psychological trauma.



He was in this building because it was his turned to be shipped over seas, and he was processing out with the unit here to go to Afghanistan.



This is an enlargement of a diagram we made for the Hasan shootings in Killeen Texas at Fort Hood.



I would use that diagram in explaining what happened to the defense lawyers.



Each one of these marks indicates - it's a code name that we were using for different people.



This person here was sitting in this chair,



That's his code and his first position, and he moved here and followed that arrow over to there.



All of the ones with red, as I said, were killed where they were.





It was about 1:30 in the afternoon. People were returning from lunch. When all the seats were filled and most of the people were back in the building,



Hasan moved from some place in this area here.



He walked up and around this kiosk which is just a desk here, and told Ms. Washington, who was a civilian, that the major wanted to see her in the major's office immediately. He told her it was an emergency.



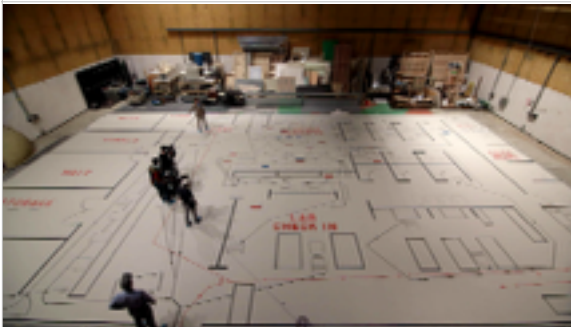
Bam bam bam bam bam bam bam - that quickly, and then reloading and bam bam bam.



He's firing shots in a fan shaped area here.



What happened is, when people heard someone yell Allah Akbar meaning god is great and start shooting they all knew immediately that it was a drill. They had been through that so many times.



All of these civilians are sitting along this row here, and were easy targets.



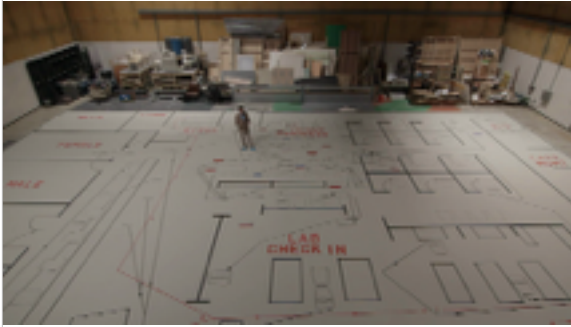
They were close targets and he could have shot them, but he didn't shoot any civilians.



He continued shooting in this area here, killing several people, injuring a lot of them, and once they realized it was not a drill, it turned into pure chaos. People were running for their lives.



Many of the male soldiers, if not most of them, tried somehow to respond aggressively. That amounted to throwing cell phones



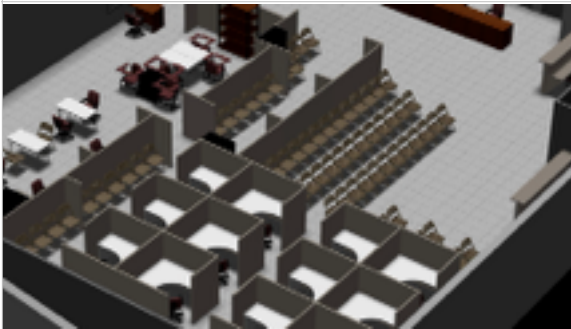
Some people tried to pick up chairs and throw them and they were shot before they could even get them over their head.



These guys had lived together, the knew eachother, they had worked together, they had trained together -



and many of them died together right here.



In this scene a young pregnant soldier, Vela, had been shot in the back and she was crying out, "My baby! My baby!" Engnehl and Sims were helping to get Vela under the partition to hide her.



Engnehl was shot three or four times. One bullet went through his neck.



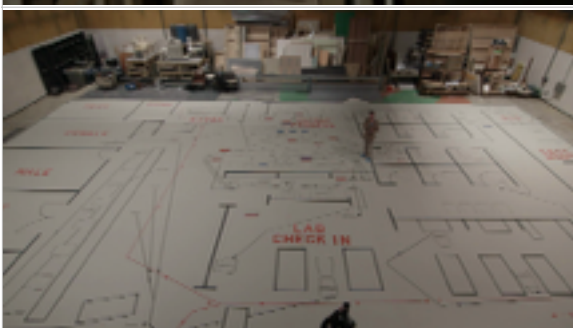
His battle buddy Sims saw Engnehl spurting blood.



When you hit an artery it spurts. So he jumped up and he clamped his hand across his battle buddy's neck.



And he kept pressure on it, enough pressure to stop the blood from spurting out,



which will save the person's life.



He gets shot twice in the back, but he's not gonna let go of the grip on his friend's neck. Saved his life.



They're taught: you depend on your friends. That's more important than killing the enemy, is making sure that you get out alive together.

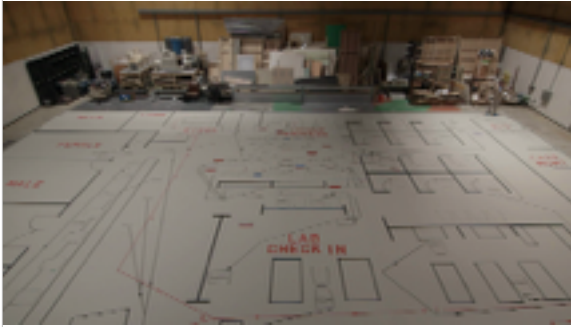


Major Parish was in her office here. She was the commandant, she was in charge of the whole unit. She ordered one of the soldiers who were in there to get information to break out the window in the back of her office.



He punched the window and broke his hand and she escaped with the soldiers out the back window.





In the mean time this door was locked.



So all these people that were hiding here were in a big huddle. They were even more sitting ducks than they had been over here.



Hasan did not want to walk past the end of this partition, because he didn't know what was down there. So he stopped here after he shot those two, turned, and he walked back towards the door. Had Hasan taken two more steps, he would have looked straight down there and seen a dozen soldiers huddled in the corner trapped, unable to escape, and he could have shot them all. That was really a god save.



Maria Guerra could hear his movement and she could trace him by the sound of the gunshots



and she listened as he fired over here, he moved down, he went out the door. When he went out the door,



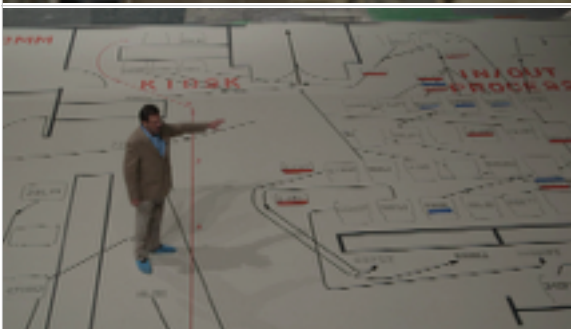
he stood up, opened the doors, came out into the floor,



saw the bodies laying around, wounded people everywhere. People are moaning, dying.



She said, "Medical staff! Let's go to work!"



She marched into the middle of this chaos over here, and everything changed.



Sgt. Guerra literally took command of the entire field. The commanding officer, as I said earlier had already escaped from her office and left the scene.



They triaged the men, they helped get them out of here on stretchers. At one point they thought that Hasan was coming back into the building; they kept working anyway.



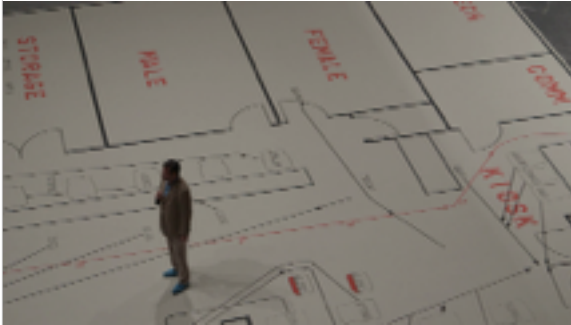
Most of these guys could have bled to death because of the kind of damage this bullet does.



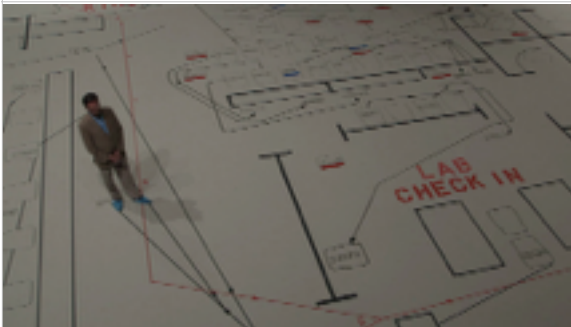
I don't know how many lives they saved.



Base police department has officers arrive. Mark Todd saw Hasan standing there. He hollered, "Drop the gun!" Hasan did not drop the gun. Mark Todd fired two shots



and hit him, one of the bullets went through him and hit his spine and dropped him and he was paralyzed for the rest of his life, which is still going on.



"I am a man. Nothing human is alien to me."



I interviewed Hasan on three different occasions. He was an intelligent man.



There's not only the consequences on this side of the gun - that side of the gun. There's the consequences on this side, because when that shot rings out, suddenly they're stone



cold sober. I've had a lot of people describe that to me. Suddenly I was sober. I realized my life was over. I've done the act. That horrible thing. Everything is changed.



"Do you think Hasan experienced anything like that?"

Well, I know the answer to that, but I can't - I'm sorry I can't say it. I talked to him about that very question, but I don't think it came out in trial.



One soldier in particular that I saw was really in conflict.



I don't know how to describe it. He was a person who was shivering inside.



He had just come back from Afghanistan.



And while in Afghanistan, he was hit by a mortar and several of them were killed and he survived. He finished his tour of duty there.



And while he was being processed through the medical facility to go back to Afghanistan, an American doctor started killing people around him.



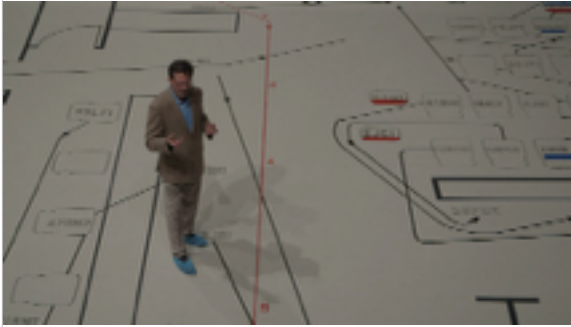
The Army probably would have got mad at me or something, but I wanted so badly to say to him, "Don't go back, you don't owe anybody anything."



I interviewed something in the area of 140 witnesses.



And a lot of times I just wanted to hug them and say, "You're alright. You're safe now." But I don't know if they'll ever be able to believe that they're safe again in their life, because that's their problem.



They would start describing an event and they come to a point where something happened, and they would just stop. They couldn't say it. And they didn't even want to think it. They didn't want to remember it.



And then I'm wondering, "Am I re-traumatizing these guys?" You know?



The prosecutions view of this was that it was premeditated event,



that was cold and calculated and carried out with no compassion. I guess that's part of our creative brain.



People want to talk about unconditional love. I don't believe there's such a thing, but I do believe there's constant violence.



For the first almost two years that I was working on this scene, preparing for trial, I maintained that objective position and I kept a wall



up between me and what I was looking at. So, I look over the wall, but I don't let get past there. And



I had been in and out of this scene, a dozen times or more. And drove up



and we walked inside the door



and I could hear the shooting and the yelling.



And I can - I'm having to block out that sound right now.



One or two cases after this, I decided I've had enough I'm gonna quit.



I never wanna see another crime scene. I never want to see another photograph of a mangled body, or look at another corpse.



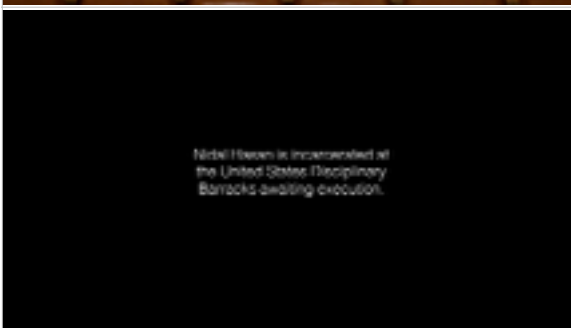
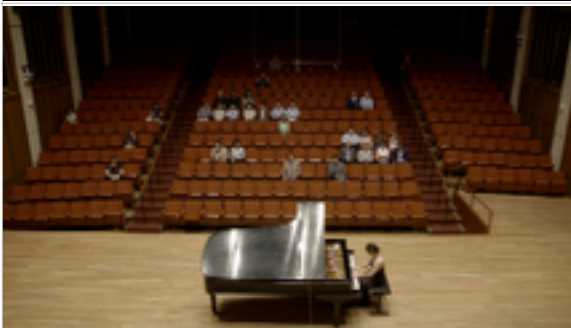
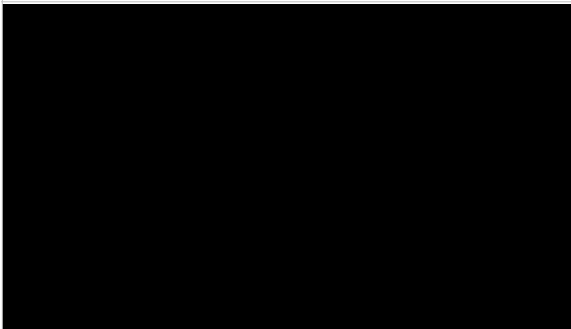
I don't want people to have to know about this, to know this happened. I wish it hadn't.



I wish that none of the soldiers that lived had to remember this. I wish it could be swept away or somehow taken care of. But it



can't. Because this is part of who we are.



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